



Fact Sheet

United States Air Force

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Historical Background

ONIZUKA AIR FORCE STATION

Onizuka Air Force Station in Sunnyvale, Calif., 37 miles south of San Francisco, is headquarters for the Air Force Satellite Control Facility. As an operational arm of Space Division, Los Angeles Air Force Station, Calif., the station monitors and controls on-orbit military spacecraft which support a wide variety of space programs.

History

Since its establishment in 1956, Onizuka AFS and the Satellite Control Facility have evolved through a variety of missions and names.

On October 29, 1956, the Lockheed Missile Systems Division became the primary contractor for one of our nation's first space projects. The company submitted a plan for a worldwide system for tracking satellites launched from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla. The first field office was established in Palo Alto, Calif., in 1958, to achieve an early orbital support capability for the Thor launch system. Support also began on a biomedical program assisting the development of the man-in-space program.

The first tracking facilities were located in the Grand Bahamas, Ascension Islands and Hawaii. Other tracking support was available through Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., Point Mugu, Calif., Kaena Point, Hawaii, and Kodiak, Alaska.

The Palo Alto site was completed in January 1959. During the launch of Discoverer I on February 28, the facility received 514 seconds of telemetry from the world's first polar orbiting satellite.

Later that year, the Air Research and Development Command (now Air Force Systems Command) established the first military unit charged with conducting military satellite operations. The organization became the 06594th Test Wing, with headquarters also at Lockheed's Palo Alto facility.

The 6593rd Test Squadron in Hawaii was then assigned to the new organization and, by the end of 1959, the Vandenberg, Hawaii and New Hampshire tracking stations had joined the Wing.

In June 1960, the 6594th Test Wing (Satellite), moved from Palo Alto to Sunnyvale where an interim control center was established in the Lockheed complex. By the end of the month, the new Satellite Test Center was activated on land purchased by the Air Force in the southeast corner of the Lockheed area.

On July 7, 1960, that facility was officially designated as the Satellite Test Annex. By the end of 1961, the central control room was capable of supporting up to three satellites simultaneously using all computerized operations.

By 1962, the network consisted of the Satellite Test Annex at Sunnyvale and its tracking stations. No two stations were configured identically as a variety of telemetry, tracking and commanding systems supported the unique requirements of more than 10 programs.

The Indian Ocean Station joined the network in August 1963.

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara directed the satellite control facility to be "nationalized" to serve as a nucleus for development of one orbital facility for all Defense Department programs. As a result, the two organizations concerned with planning and operating the satellite control facility were integrated into a single organizational element under one manager.

At the end of 1964, Air Force Systems Command directed that the Space Systems Division deputy commander for Satellite Control Operations command the Air Force Satellite Control Facility. The headquarters, planning activities, program control, procurement and similar functions remained with Space Division. The director of Test Operations, however, would be the commander of Detachment 1, Air Force Satellite Control Facility at Sunnyvale.

The Satellite Test Annex was redesignated Sunnyvale Air Force Station in 1971, taking its name from the surrounding community. The headquarters and other staff functions moved from Los Angeles to Sunnyvale in 1977. Telemetry and Command Station Oakhanger, United Kingdom, joined the Air Force Satellite Control Facility network as a shared resource in 1978.

During 1979, the Defense Satellite Communications System-Satellite Control Facility Interface System, a major advance in data transmission capabilities, was declared operational at the New Hampshire Tracking Station.

At the same time, the Indian Ocean Station was modified to support the Space Shuttle orbital flight testing. On April 12, 1981, the Satellite Control Facility supported the first spaceflight of the orbiter Columbia.

Air Force Satellite Control Facility

Today, the Air Force Satellite Control Facility at Onizuka Air Force Station continues to be responsible for acquiring, maintaining and operating the spacecraft support network for the Department of Defense.

The Satellite Test Center at Onizuka AFS is the nerve center for the Satellite Control Facility operations. It is linked to all the remote tracking stations by an intricate communications network. Tracking stations are found at Vandenberg Air Force Base, the Royal Air Force Oakhanger facility, England; New Hampshire; Indian Ocean facility in the Seychelles Group; Kaena Point Air Force Station, Hawaii; Anderson Air Force Base, Guam; and Thule Air Base, Greenland.

The center commands and controls all Defense Department space shuttle missions from launch through landing, and provides shuttle flight planning, flight readiness and support. The organization centralizes command and control of the entire shuttle tracking network, and efficiently uses existing resources. This meets the rising demand for space support and reduces life cycle costs through reduction of equipment and manpower.

The facility continuously supports spacecraft whose missions include navigation, meteorology and communications. It constitutes the free world's largest and busiest satellite control network.

On July 25, 1986, Sunnyvale Air Force Station was renamed Onizuka in honor of Lieutenant Colonel Ellison S. Onizuka, USAF, who perished as a crew member aboard the space shuttle Challenger on January 28, 1986.

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